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SUBJECT: EDUCATION MINISTER CHENG ON PRC STUDENTS, MARKET  
ACCESS, AND THE FULBRIGHT PROGRAM

REF: A. TAIPEI 8

1B. 2007 TAIPEI 2595

11. (SBU) Summary: Taiwan authorities are considering allowing up to 1,000 PRC students per year to study in Taiwan, and may begin recognizing degrees from first-tier PRC universities. The Ministry of Education is "favorable" to clarifications of the Fulbright program's legal status sought by the U.S., and Education Minister Cheng Jei-cheng told the Director during a September 15 meeting that he wants to actively cooperate with AIT to both liberalize Taiwan's regulations on market access for foreign schools, and monitor progress combating campus intellectual property rights (IPR) violations.

Unfortunately, he seemed unfamiliar with the Ministry's Campus Intellectual Property Action Plan, but he highlighted the importance of strengthening progress. End summary.

12. (SBU) During a September 15 meeting with the Director and AIT officers, Education Minister Cheng Jei-cheng said although recognizing PRC degrees and opening to full-time PRC students are sensitive and difficult issues, his Ministry has been studying these issues over the past three months to come up with a workable plan. Cheng said the current thinking is to allow up to 1,000 PRC students per year to come to Taiwan, and to review the situation after one or two years to see if it would be possible to increase the number. As for PRC degrees, Cheng said that, due to the large number of Chinese universities, Taiwan would likely begin by recognizing degrees from universities that the PRC regime has listed as China's top 100 schools before considering recognizing degrees from lesser-known schools.

13. (SBU) Cheng agreed with the Director about the importance of protecting IPR on and around Taiwan's university campuses, but seemed unfamiliar with the MOE's Campus IP Action Plan (ref A). Cheng noted that Taiwan and the U.S. should continue to meet regularly to review Taiwan's progress under the Plan, and that the two sides should set further goals for campus IPR protection.

14. (SBU) After a brief overview of current Taiwan laws concerning MOE certification for branch campuses, Minister Cheng commented Taiwan wants to open its education market to the best universities in the world--including those from the United States and China--and is therefore interested in our proposals on how Taiwan should revise its laws to welcome more international schools. Cheng added Taiwan would study our proposals and then have MOE staff meet with us at regular, six-month intervals to review Taiwan's progress toward liberalization. Cheng's attitude is more liberal than the preceding Minister of Education Tu Sheng-cheng, who did not think Taiwan needed to loosen requirements for foreign schools to set up branches in Taiwan, since in his view Taiwan already had too many colleges (ref B).

¶5. (U) In response to the PAO's request that the MOE support clarifying the legal status of the Foundation for Scholarly Exchange (FSE), which runs the Fulbright Program in Taiwan, via "Letters of Exchange" between TECRO and AIT, Section Chief Pauline Chen from the MOE Office of International Culture and Education said that the Ministry would follow MOFA's September 12 recommendation to the MOE that the legal clarifications sought by the United States are "favorable". Chen added, however, that the MOE will still need to consult with the Ministry of Finance on the taxable status of Fulbright grants, as well as with the Department of Health regarding possible National Health Insurance coverage for Fulbright scholars. Minister Cheng said that he is unfamiliar with the details of the U.S. requests, but that he would "do his best" to see that the MOE and other Taiwan agencies implement our recommendations.

Comment

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¶6. (SBU) Cheng, a lifelong academic in his first government position, gave the impression of not yet being fully on top of his ministerial portfolio. He frequently deferred to more junior staff to address the issues under discussion, and spent much of the meeting skimming background materials on the topics. At the same time, he seemed generally agreeable to the points raised by the Director, and eager to work with us in the future. End comment.

YOUNG